



## **PREVENTION & HEALTH PROMOTION IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE: MEANING, CONTENTS AND TARGETS OF KINETIC EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract:**

Health, as an asset in danger, belongs to the acute social problems in the transition to the third millennium. Prevention and health promotion are of significant value especially in childhood and adolescence. The purpose of this study was to approach, analyze and finally examine the importance, the content and objectives of movement-oriented prevention and health promotion. We address the following questions: to what extent movement, play and sports contribute to the positive personality development, how they end up improving a person's self-image, which is due to movement and sport, and what importance is attributed to body perception and the gains of agency. Furthermore, the role of personal and social resources is explained as well as how they can be developed and strengthened. The method adopted for this study was a review of the bibliography. In the light of this study, it is noted that the potential to use movement, play and sport as prevention measures consists more of support and positive influence on the physical and mental development of children and young people, and less of information supply and intimidation measures. Movement on the one hand regulates food delivery and calorie consumption and on the other hand helps to degrade anxiety and to remove internal tensions and aggression. Appropriate movement is the most important means of physical and mental development; it allows the recognition and familiarization of the social and natural environment, it ensures the coordination of all the experiences of the senses and it is the driving force for the overall physical, mental and social development of a child.

**Keywords:** prevention, health promotion, kinetic education, childhood

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## 1. Introduction

The task of movement, play and sport, as regards to preventing and promoting health in childhood and adolescence, is the optimal mental and physical development. It is an important basis for the development of cognitive, social and emotional behaviors. This is accomplished with the holistic oriented kinetic education that helps the personality development (Education with movement and for the movement) (HOLLMANN, 2004). According to BOES et al. (2002), kinetic education is a multidimensional learning process that pursues mental, motor and social goals.

**The mental goals include:**

- promoting individual functions and areas of perception as a prerequisite for an improved motor promotion (mainly related to body coordination),
- creating, restoring or maintaining an acceptable sense of body for avoiding or reducing mental and psychosomatic disorders,
- increasing the individual's self-confidence and the trust in his / her abilities,
- fighting the fear of movement,
- balancing performance and school stress, and
- promoting willingness for physical effort and multi-faceted motor activities.

**Motor goals include, among others:**

- the ability and reinforcement of multifarious physical experiences,
- prevention of cardio-circulatory diseases, obesity and motor system damage,
- avoiding or preventing vertebral column weaknesses; and
- improving mobility and performance capabilities.

**Social goals worth mentioning are the following:**

- development or strengthening of self-awareness
- degradation of behavioral disorders and the consequential damages,
- degradation or avoidance of communication and language disorders,
- building and stabilizing a psycho-social balance,
- building or stabilizing social inclusion, and
- sport orientation in free time.

Kinetic education should take into account the development of the whole personality and aim at developing all personality areas. It should act as a mediator between personality and health, as well as contribute to the development of the individual's responsibility, independence and action itself. It also concerns the prevention of motor, psychosomatic and social weaknesses as well as the strengthening, stabilization and improvement of physical, personal and social resources (similarly).

Furthermore, movement, play and sports could sub serve the development of certain beliefs with regard to control. Thus, the individual does not perceive health and illness as an unchanging situation, but experiences it as a situation that he/she can have an effect on.

In Abele and Brehm (1989), we find a survey regarding the question whether and how much sporting action can contribute to addressing development work. Having as

an example the development work "Accepting Individual Physical Appearance and Effective Use of the Body", four reinforcing conditions are emerging for effective treatment:

**a) Confidence in one's abilities**

The less one appreciates one's own abilities the worse one's expected result of the same energy and the lesser one's efforts to cope. With movement, play and sport, such important action capabilities can be acquired.

**b) Perceived control**

Everyone has the need to exercise control over one's life and to consider oneself "responsible" for the results. The feeling of control is an important precondition for emotional stability and the willingness to try. If a young person for a long time does not live as responsible for the results and the attempts to regain control fail, his or her efforts are gradually reduced and this can lead to loss of motivation and depression. The longer the sense of loss of control lasts, the less effort is made to deal with it. With motor actions and with contact with devices and materials, children and young people can find that they are creators of certain results and that they have control over their movements and can be improved through exercise. (Zimmer, 1998).

**c) Basic positive emotional status**

If there is predominantly a negative basic feeling, attention is slowly turning to the individual's condition. This means that coping efforts can be directed less equally into other areas. The positive effects caused by sports such as *having fun* and *feeling good* can contribute to a positive basic mood (Abele & Brehm, 1989).

**d) General activity**

By practicing sports, a person can objectively become more efficient, and thus feel subjectively motivated. The greater the activity, the greater the coping efforts.

Abele and Brehm (1989) concede that evolutionary works are not independent of one another and that completing a work has supportive effect on completing the others. Also, evolutionary works constitute "acceptance of the individual body appearance and effective use of the body", a central work in adolescence, the completion of which is a prerequisite for solving further evolutionary works (e.g., the acquisition of gender role). The writings from the above thesis do not lead to the conclusion that a child / young person is engaged in sports, so he is better able to cope with evolutionary work. Correlations in the lives of children and young people are somewhat more complex. However, the four above-mentioned terms can be helped by physical activity and sport.

## **2. Methodology**

The present research is a bibliographic review study, presenting the critical points of the existing knowledge on the prevention and promotion of health in childhood and adolescence. There is no specialized and comprehensive work on this subject in Greek literature as well as in international literature. This work endeavors to cover this gap, and will perhaps also be a useful aid for those who in the future will attempt similar

efforts. The main aim of the bibliographic review is to frame the study within the "body" of the relevant literature. The review of the current study concerns clearly formulated questions and uses systematic and explicit criteria for critically analyzing a body of published papers by summarizing, sorting, grouping and comparing.

### **3. Bibliographic review study**

#### **3.1 Kinetic education – Promoting social and personal resources**

The way in which movement and sport affect the resources of physical health is evidenced by various surveys. These concern e.g. the efficiency of the cardio-circulatory system or the immune system, as well as the resistance of the passive motor system. In this chapter, we study only the effects of movement, play and sport on social and personal resources.

Social health resources refer to restraint and emotional and social support by the social group of reference as relatives and friends. They are crucial for maintaining health and reducing risk factors. Whether and to what extent social resources are available to children and young people and to what degree they are used depends, among other things, on social skills (in particular on the ability to communicate and co-operate). These capabilities include e.g. understanding, tolerance, compromise, fairness, flexibility in dealing with prepared rules and evaluation criteria. Not all children are able to approach others positively without problem and collaborate creatively with others (WOLL & BOES, 2001). That is why it is important to constantly create opportunities that require children and young people to act together and thus contribute to the development of social skills. An atmosphere of mutual recognition and mentally relaxed sociability should be created. Social resources are personality attributes, which are expressed in how one perceives oneself. These include, among other things, a positive idea for one's body and for oneself, control beliefs and expectations of how effective one is. Personal resources are protective factors that can help deal with daily loads and critical events.

##### **Such protective factors are:**

- the belief that one's action is meaningful,
- the willingness to engage
- the belief that one can maintain control over critical life events (internal control conviction),
- a fundamentally optimistic approach (optimism),
- a general approach to change in life as a challenge (positive response to change).
- the expectation that one can become effective thanks to one's abilities (trust in oneself, positive self-confidence, stable ego system),
- the willingness to pursue one's own goals,
- basic receptivity to the new, curiosity about life,
- trust in other people / ability to form social relationships,
- a relaxed self-esteem and

- the ability to withstand conflicts (Paletta, 2001).

Subsequently, we examine the way in which children and young people can build and stabilize these protective factors and how the resources of mature individuals can be strengthened, so that they are able to positively influence their present and future lives. An important role here plays the idea of the individual for himself/herself and his/her body, and sense of agency.

### 3.2 The concept of «I»

How children and young people appreciate their skills, namely whether they have confidence in their abilities, whether they respond to challenges or give up easily when problems occur, whether they are actively approaching others or behave in anticipation, depends on the image children and young people have for themselves. This image of the *ego* reflects the experiences gained in the confrontation with their environment, as well as the expectations their environment has of them. The image of the *ego* is determined by the physical experiences the child acquires in the first years of life. Through body and motion, children develop an image of their abilities and acquire a perception of themselves. With motor actions, children can gather experiences about what they can and what they cannot do. They experience success and failure, as well as performance and boundaries. They also learn to what degree others appreciate them and what they trust in them. All these accumulated experiences, knowledge and information mature into the so-called *ego concept*. Developing a positive image of the *ego* is considered to be an important educational goal. The notion of *ego perception* is defined as the knowledge that a person acquires for himself based on the experience, which is stored in memory, mainly about physical characteristics, general conditions for action, the experienced and the implicit behavioral effectiveness in various demanding situations and the development goals of the individual himself. Into the *perception of the ego* flow both one's own interpretations as well as feedback from the surroundings. It consists of several parts: on the one hand, of *cognitively oriented components* (= *image of the ego*) and on the other of *emotionally oriented components* (= *self-confidence*). The *image of ego* refers to a person's neutral descriptive characteristics and includes the knowledge of oneself (appearance, abilities, powers). The sense of self-confidence describes one's satisfaction with the features as one perceives them, and plays an important role in dealing with the problems. People with weak self-confidence may find it more difficult to assert themselves than people who have strong self-confidence and trust in their abilities. Especially in childhood and adolescence, it is important to live in an encouraging environment, characterized by participation and respect, because someone who has not experienced appreciation cannot develop a positive image of himself/herself. A positive sense of self-confidence can only be created under certain conditions. Even if it is formed at some point, it may be in danger due to emotional loads and problems. For this reason, children and young people need to develop a sense of self-confidence that is so powerful against negative external conditions that they can

withstand these conditions (Alfermann & Stiller, 2003). The formation of self-confidence is also linked closely to the sense of body confidence (Sygusch, 2000).

### **3.3 The perception of the body**

Body perception and self-confidence develop mainly through the body. Children acquire their first experiences about themselves and their environment initially through their bodies.

According to Mrazek (1991), body evaluation is the basis for assessing the value of the ego. For this reason, the development of physical and motor evolution is particularly important for the care of optimal child development. Although objective anatomical and physiological characteristics are an important prerequisite for self-confidence, most important is how they are dealt with. The child does not objectively experience physical abilities, but perceives and evaluates them based on previous experiences. At this point, the personal experience with the body plays a significant role, as well as the evaluation of the same body by others and how one understands the bodies of others. Therefore, self-esteem and the attitude towards the body are closely interrelated. A positive attitude towards their own body is an important condition for the satisfaction of the individuals by themselves and their life. On the other hand, a negative attitude towards the body can cause problems, which may not only concern the body, but other areas too. Especially in adolescence, the perception of the body is a basic parameter. In an increasingly complex environment, the body as the only concrete viable part of the ego is the principal support of the individual's identity. When it concerns young people, the body plays a key role in how they perceive and understand themselves. The most important aspects of body perception in adolescence are appearance, health, physical performance, the nice body, body contact, body care and nutrition. Physical performance is one of the most important components of body perception. With greater physical performance or with the changed positive perception of the person's body image, the body perception and therefore the perception that the individual has for himself/herself can be positively affected. In a society in which the physical part plays an increasingly important role (i.e. a young athletic body is considered fashionable), body perception becomes an important component of ego perception (Mrazek & Hartmann, 1989).

### **3.4 Sense of agency and control beliefs**

The sense of agency is an important parameter of the perception of the ego. It includes the subjective belief that one can succeed and change something on one's own, that is, one can have an impact on the material and social environment. It also includes the belief that one has control over each situation. With the perception of the effectiveness of one's own acts and behavior, one draws conclusions about oneself. In motor activities, while in contact with gadgets or toys, children may find that they can produce results themselves (they build a tower of wood sticks, shatter it, and then rebuild it). They attribute the result to their own actions, effort and abilities. This creates

a primary understanding of their abilities. Likewise, in sports, children and young people see themselves as responsible for their success (to achieve a motor task) and that with repetition and exercise they can be improved. The feeling that they have succeeded and can do something is the basis for gaining trust in themselves. However, there are certain situations where the opposite can happen. If a successful result is attributed to luck or the person's sense of agency is estimated to be low, then the child may show less pride in what has been achieved. This can result in avoidance behavior and negative assessment of the ego. Children and young people who have little trust in themselves will often experience less success and therefore their negative expectations will be confirmed. This can become a vicious circle. If, on the contrary, a person has high expectations of agency, that is, if one trusts that one can control a situation or carry out a task, one will trust oneself for a certain degree of difficulty and be motivated to accomplish the task. The positive expectation of abilities leads to an increase in self-confidence and is a potential gain in terms of the trust a person has in himself/herself. The experienced mental stability can render individuals capable of acting in a self-defying manner, expressing their own positions, asserting themselves against common opinions, creating their own rules and measures of values, watching over the weak and helping others. This ability plays a significant role, particularly with regard to group coercion and dangerous behavior (Zimmer, 2000).

### **3.5 Motion, play, sport and the perception of the ego**

Motor dexterity, physical performance and motor skills are of great value to children, so the experience of physical inferiority, fear and insecurity has a rapid impact on how one understands oneself and hence on the children's perception of the ego, while at the same time it affects the social situation and the position within the group (Zimmer, 2001). The perception of the ego affects the behavior of children and young people. The way they perceive and appreciate themselves determines their satisfaction, their willingness to try and how they handle the problems or face new situations (Zimmer, 2001a). If, for example, there is a positive ego concept, the child or young person is convinced that he/she can overcome difficult requirements and problems. New requirements are seen as a challenge. On the contrary, in the case of a negative perception of the ego, unknown situations are often experienced as threatening and there is little prospect of success. If a child has less trust in himself/herself than in reality and might be considered by others as awkward, that child feels that he/she confirms the role of a loser or a failure. If children / young people have constantly bad experiences in motor situations, due to negative physical experiences, there is a risk that this may be transferred also to other areas. That is to say, they are not only afraid of failing in situations of movement and sport or that they will not be recognized by other children / other young people, but they also flinch from other daily situations. Perception of the ego, action and experience are interdependent. If, for example, one is considered athletic, it is more likely that one will become athletically active. On the contrary, the

experience of frequent failures can lead to the formation of a negative perception of the ego (Alfermann & Stiller, 2003).

This, however, does not mean that the experience of failure must be avoided at all costs, because failure can also be a learning experience and help individuals learn to appreciate themselves and various situations. It is also crucial if this failure is attributed to potential incomplete movement or incomplete effort. If the success of an act is attributed to internal causes, that is, the person feels that he/she has caused it, changes in the perception of the ego can occur. Attributing success or failure to specific causes has a decisive effect on the ego image, because the child thus constructs cognitive perceptions, which act as interpretive patterns (Zimmer, 2001).

Children and young people perceive themselves in a certain way, ascribe to themselves certain attributes and evaluate themselves. This affects their individual ability to act. In order to understand and evaluate their abilities and capabilities, physical and motor skills are of particular importance. Through physical and motor skills in movement, play and sport, valuation can often be achieved. Sport achievements and success are recognized by both peers and adults. Sport offers young people the ability to achieve performance that is recognized, appreciated and respected in the adult world and, unlike abstract school praises, is characterized by an appreciable, comprehensive reward (Kurz & Brinkhoff, 1999).

With the help of physical and motor skills, children and young people can on the one hand appreciate their abilities. On the other hand, these abilities also affect the expectations their social environment has of them. However, objectively similar performances can be subjectively assessed completely differently. That is because all information that individuals receive about themselves is evaluated and interpreted subjectively. The assessment of one's capabilities results from the evaluation of one's actions and therefore would not correspond exactly to real talent. Therefore, another important criterion for evaluating the ego is the image that others have for one person according to their own perceptions. A child often sees himself/herself in the mirror of those who play with him/her (Zimmer, 2001).

This means that children may consider themselves to be awkward and unattractive because others (parents, teachers, other children) think so, though objectively that might not be the case at all. The perception of the evaluation by others can lead to the acceptance of their criteria and the adaptation of the ego image to those criteria. This is especially true for children with movement or motor disabilities (Zimmer & Hunger, 2004).

### **3.5.1 The perception of the ego through the perception of the body**

As the ego concept is hierarchically structured (the upper level is self-confidence), we accept that the positive influence of an individual perception (such as body perception) also affects positively other levels. Self-confidence and the attitude towards the body are closely interdependent. A positive attitude towards the body is an important condition for positive self-esteem, which in turn is a prerequisite for human existence



and for a life without stress. Therefore, a satisfactory life requires a positive attitude towards the body. On the contrary, a negative attitude towards the body creates problems that are not only related to the body, but rather reach also other areas of life. In order to positively influence the development of somatics and body perception, one should first develop and promote the perception of the body, i.e. the conscious perception of the body, its efficient potential and its limits, as well as its ability to deal with discomforts and feelings (Sygusch, 2000). This includes learning to recognize the reactions of the body and to perceive, experience and understand how it feels mentally when it is moving (exhaustion, relaxation, warmth, pulse count, vitality and satisfaction). With the experience of fatigue and effort, relaxation after effort, concentration of motor impressions in jogging, jumping, throwing etc., and the experience of heat and cold, breathing, heartbeats etc., the body sensation can be enhanced. Thus, with movement and athletic exercise, there develops the possibility of the individual becoming influenced with regard to the body, something that can provide incentives for actively influencing the state of the individual's health (Paletta, 2001).

Research about changes in ego perception through sports is rare. However, children and young people show a long-term growth in self-confidence with sporting activities, while results in adult self-confidence are less apparent. This is explained by the great relationship between body perception and self-confidence in childhood and adolescence. Physical activity improves the perception of the ego, sporting success favors a positive perception of the ego, and self-confidence in children and young people in particular is positively influenced by (subjectively successful) physical activity (Alfermann & Stiller, 2003).

Changes in the perception of the ego through athletics are mainly achieved by the change in body perception, where the basic parameters consist of physical performance, appearance and health. Physical efficiency is the most important component of the body perception for the young people and hence the perception of the ego. Athletically active young people differ from non-active in terms of the ego and body perception. Active young people evaluate their appearance more positively and take more care of it. They evaluate social contacts more positively, have more self-confidence and are more satisfied with themselves. They, therefore, have a more positive ego image than the inactive young people. Athletic activity leads to improved body perception, which will contribute to improved self-confidence and therefore to a more positive perception of the ego. A deciding factor for this issue is the enhanced image of the ego and the confidence in the physical sector caused by sporting activity. Athletic activity changes the perception of the body in such a way that different aspects, such as physical efficiency, are influenced by athletic training to obtain endurance. The sense of agency is also improved. As a result, children and young people experience a change in self-confidence. Self-confidence through athletic performance can thus enhance confidence in the person's abilities and have a positive impact on the building of self-confidence as regards the body, which in turn can lead to improved self-esteem.

However, we have to bear in mind that often failures can have the opposite effect. With lack of satisfaction from their performance, stigmatization or censure from the team or the trainers, there is a risk that children will doubt their efficiency. This can prevent building a steady self-confidence with regard to the body and thus a more general self-confidence (Sygusch, 2000).

To avoid this, one has to give children and young people achievable goals in motor and athletic situations, and to individualize the way of teaching and learning. They should feel that their performance is positive. This also requires that teachers, trainers, coaches, etc. should focus less on mistakes, and instead emphasize and enhance every small success. The ego concept should be developed with recognition and positive attitudes; that is through successful tasks or improved performance such as increased endurance (Bund, 2001).

Body perception and perception of the ego are considered as important health resources. Particularly in childhood and adolescence they can be improved by sporting activity. As movement, play and sport affect the perception of the body and hence the perception of the ego, mainly in a positive sense, they generally enhance the health resources that are given through the perception of the ego. If a young person through sporting activities and successes strengthens the perception of the ego and the acceptance of the ego, then this young person will built up enough ego awareness and will no longer have to compensate for potential weaknesses with dangerous for the health behaviour and demonstrative consumption of nicotine, alcohol and hard drugs (Kurz & Brinkhoff, 1999).

#### 4. Conclusions and importance for physical education

Research shows that regular and appropriate movement and exercise affect the physical/motor development and health. Particularly in the field of children and adolescents, sports can contribute, with proper guidance, in promoting development and preventing diseases that derive from lack of movement. It strengthens social resources (integration and support) and personal resources (sense of self-confidence), which play an important role in processing emotional loads and overcoming them. These resources can be used to deal with daily emotional loads and overwork. Good personal resources, such as a positive self-image, function in such a manner that, when a critical event occurs in life, the potential for self-action is appreciated more positively. Therefore, we basically accept that movement, play and sport can contribute to positively influencing the self-image, which in turn has a positive effect on dealing with difficulties. Athletic activity not only strengthens personal resources, but it also protects against long-lasting burdens - it is something like a **stress absorber**. For example, emotional loads and tensions can be reduced by the well-being caused by exercise and thus a person's self-image can be protected from negative influences. In addition to transmitting success experiences and boosting confidence in one's physical performance, it is important that children and young people experience the anticipated

and desirable effects of movement and exercise on their own body. With the planned inducement of positive mental effects (i.e. have fun, feel good, eliminate stress), they feel that they can affect their emotional state themselves.

If someone often feels good while doing sports, this can contribute to a positive basic mood, which can be generalized in other areas of everyday life. But this depends on how regular the athletic activity is, one's motivation for exercising, the satisfaction one derives, the experience of success when one is exercised, and the aspects of the trainer's behaviour.

## 5. Epilogue

The disappearance of free natural spaces for movement, and the growing use of media and technology have led to a loss of spatial, social and direct physical-aesthetic experiences. Consequences for children and young people are often expressed as weaknesses in coordination and physical posture, obesity, perception and cognitive impairment, antisocial and aggressive behaviour, reduced physical strength, addiction problems as well as mental and psychosomatic damages.

Offers, in terms of movement, play and sports, should be organized in such a way that children and young people experience success. To this end, it is necessary for the teaching and learning method to be individualized and diversified, to offer simplifications and to present achievable accessible goals.

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